DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 083 624 CS 200 775

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TITLE Communication and National Development--The Contribution of Wilbur Schramm.
PUB DATE Aug 73
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (Fort Collins, Colorado, August 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Communication (Thought Transfer); Developing Nations; *Economic Development; *Information Dissemination; Journalism; *Mass Media; *Nationalism; Political Socialization; Social Change
IDENTIFIERS *Schramm (Wilbur)

ABSTRACT

The efforts of Wilbur Schramm are largely responsible for the general understanding of the key role that communication plays in the political and economic development of emerging nations. Development of communication channels is closely interrelated with the complex processes of political, social, and economic evolution in the new countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. Schramm has been concerned with how communication development can serve to accelerate political, economic, and social growth. He asserts that communication assists in public understanding and acceptance of national goals and the individual's responsibilities for attaining them. Economic development is especially dependent upon communication channels but must also provide the financial and material support for communication media. Schramm's theme has been that the mass media can be used for explaining goals, raising aspirations, and creating a climate for national development. Further, the media assist in providing more widespread education through teacher support (or substitution). Schramm also indicates that development of the media encourages political democracy with its attempts to involve the public in decision-making processes. (RN)

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ED 083624

COMMUNICATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- The Contributions of Wilbur Schramm -

Presented at Plenary Session

Association for Education in Journalism 1973 Convention

Fort Collins, Colorado, August 1973

In Honor of

Professor Wilbur Schramm

Recipient of Deustchmann Award in Communication Research

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When future historians evaluate the events in the years after World War II, they may or may not consider the trips to the moon to have very much greater impact on human life than the world-wide movement of national development. India was the first to set an example in 1947. Soon afterwards, colonies and semi-colonies in Asia, Africa, Middle East and Latin America began to free themselves from the bondage of their masters. For a while, the task of developing these new lands was considered to be primarily an economic problem once political independence is won. The general acceptance of the concept that communication plays a key role in national development is largely attributable to the work of the man we are honoring today.

That an emerging country should want to invest a considerable amount of its scarce resources in the development of communication media in order to accelerate economic and social development must have sounded odd at first. But when we consider national development not just in terms of increase of gross national product, but as an ongoing process of social transformation involving change in its economic and social structure, then communication development should be a major concern. As Professor Schramm has suggested, "the structure of social communication reflects the structure and development of society."[1]

To elaborate on this point, let me quote a brief passage from Schramm:

> As nations move from the patterns of traditional society toward the patterns of modern industrial society, spectacular developments take place in their communication. From one point of view,

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[1]Wilbur Schramm, "Communication Development and the Development Process," in Lucian W. Pye (ed.) Communications and Political Development, Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 34.

> developments in communication are brought about by the economic, social, and political evolution which is part of the national growth. From another view point, however, they are among the chief makers and movers of that evolution.[2]

This passage, it seems to me, is a key note to Schramm's conceptualization of the interaction between communication and national development.

Before presenting the major concepts of Professor Schramm's theoretical framework, however, I should like to digress briefly and review the trend of research in communication and national development. If I may be allowed to characterize research in this field by the nature of the independent variables and dependent variables, i.e., whether they are individually or structurally oriented, then we can see a two by two classification. Most of the research employs some individual traits or behavioral characteristics as both the independent variables and dependent variables. For instance, individuals who read the newspaper or listen to the radio would have less traditional attitudes, etc. A few studies have used structural features, for instance, the existence of some organization in the community, as the independent variables and examined their impact in terms of individual traits or behavior as the dependent variables. A few other investigators have observed individual use of mass communication as an independent variable, and examined its impact on the social structure as a dependent variable.

Schramm's major concern appears to be different from these. In his conceptualization, both the independent variable and dependent variable are structural features, rather than individual traits or behavior. Using a system approach, he has conceptualized a society to be a boundary-maintaining set of interdependent components:

> By interdependence we mean a relationship of parts in which anything happening to one component of a system affects, no matter how slighly, the balance and relationship of the whole

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[2] Op. Cit., p. 30.

> system. By boundary-maintaining we mean a state in which the components are so related that it is possible to tell where the system ends and its environment begins.[3]

Following this approach, Schramm is essentially interested in the intertwining structural relations between the various components. In this sense, the interrelation between communication and national development becomes, conceptually speaking, a question of how the communication system and the economic, political and social structure will be related to each other as a nation goes through the complex process of social change generally referred to as national development. Indeed this interrelation is so intimate, as Professor Schramm has over and again emphasized, both in his writings and in his classes, that we could regard economic, social and political evolution as change of communication structure. This concept becomes clear when we realize that the economic, social and political evolution involved in the process of national development will necessitate not only a higher degree of role specification and differentiation, but also a new structure of role relations, and thus new patterns of communication channels.

A person contented to play the role of a detached observer would probably limit himself to a theoretical framework of this nature, and see how a particular boundary-maintaining social system would adapt and adjust to changes in some of its major structural components due to the introduction of mass communication. Professor Schramm is more than a detached observer. From his writings and his lectures, one cannot but sense the warm concern he has for the millions of people in Asia, Africa, Middle East and Latin America. To him, these are not just subjects to be observed or cases to be entered for statistical analysis. He has met many of them, joined in

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[3]Ibid.

their conversations, and shared their problems. These are people whom he has related to on a personal basis, people whom he wants to help. Thus, in addition to his theoretical conceptualization of the interrelation between communication and national development, Professor Schramm has been occupied in the last ten years or so with a problem of a more practical nature. That is, what can we do about communication development in order to accelerate the process of economic growth and social development?

Turning his attention to the economic aspect, which perhaps affects people most, Professor Schramm proposes a number of conditions that must be met before economic development can take place. If communication is to contribute to the process of economic growth, it must be used to facilitate the fulfilment of these functional requisites.

Some of the functional requisites relate to cognitive changes. First, he has suggested, there must be a feeling of nation-ness, without which no nation can pierce the economic barrier. There must be willingness to defer gratification until the nation as a whole can afford them. In other words, there must be acceptance of group or national goals over and above some of the individual goals. There must be understanding on the part of the people as to why they are making an effort. There must be a feeling that they have a part in determining what shall be done. And there must be the acquisition of new skills and knowledge that are necessary for economic development.

Other functional requisites for economic development appear to be structural in nature. There must be an extension of the effective market to accommodate economic development. There must be the designation and acceptance of new roles, with their new responsibilities and new role relations.

Conceptually, there seems to be little doubt that communication development not only can accelerate the pace of economic growth, but is

actually essential to economic development. As Schramm has suggested:

> As economic activity spreads throughout the system, the act of balancing and sharing the strain becomes more delicate; it requires quicker reports from farther away and quicker orders to more scattered centers. Components must be in touch. The same kind of understandings, the same bases for cooperation, which have existed among a few must be made to exist among many. Knowledge must be gathered more broadly and shared more widely. Information must be transmitted more swiftly, not only for the period of the five-year plan or even for the period of great economic development, but permanently--because the national system is moving toward a level of functioning that will always require wide and swift communication. Thus the developing nation must be prepared to support an enormous increase in the day-to-day communication within the system.[4]

Empirically, however, how this state of communication development can be achieved presents a serious question. Much of his effort in the last decade has been directed to a search for answers to this empirical question. We can perhaps appreciate the enormity of the difficulties involved, when we realize that while economic development would depend on communication development, the kind of communication development we would like to see would be extremely difficult to achieve without an adequate basis of economic development. Without the material support of equipment and supplies, without the managerial support of qualified personnel, and without the financial support of advertising income and a sizable, literate readership, no such communication development would be possible. In this sense, economic development, education, urbanization, and communication development all become tangled together. As Professor Schramm has observed, we would have to expect a nation to pull itself up painfully, inch by inch, by its own bootstraps.

With this arduous process in mind, Professor Schramm does not assume any particular order or sequence in which the different aspects of development are expected to take place. In fact, the research evidence

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[4]Op. Cit., p. 43.

we have today would cast considerable doubt as to whether there is one universally applicable development sequence for the transformation of traditional societies. Rather, it seems that whether one aspect of development would precede another would depend on the social structure and cultural background of the nation involved.

In a similar sense, Professor Schramm does not advocate any one particular strategy for the use of communication in order to promote national development. Rather, he emphasizes the importance of cultural fit when one designs a development program using the various media of mass communication and interpersonal communication. Depending on the task required, the audience to be reached, and the resources available, the Big Media are not necessarily more preferable than the Little Media. Regardless of the kinds of media employed, the group processes must not be ignored.

Professor Schramm's awareness that the road of national development may take a number of directions does not imply, however, that he does not have a system of priority as to how he would like to see communication media most effectively utilized. Schramm has suggested, rather convincingly, that mass media can be used to widen horizons, raise aspirations, focus attention, create a climate for development, and feed the interpersonal channels. But above all, he has been most actively engaged in the use of mass media as teachers to break the barriers of ignorance, because he believes the problems in most developing countries are not so much due to poverty of material resources as due to underdevelopment of manpower. He would like to use mass media to substitute the teacher not yet trained and to support the teacher not trained well enough. The educational television project he undertook in El Salvador, his many trips to American Samoa and to Africa, the plans he drew up for using satellites to promote education and information dissemination on family planning in India--all of these reflect his deep

concern for the welfare of the underdeveloped half of the world, and his effort to use mass communication in a way that will have the greatest benefit.

Although he is primarily concerned with the relation between communication and economic development, particularly with the use of mass media to teach skills and disseminate information, Professor Schramm has not ignored another aspect in the developmental process, namely, political development. He is fully cognizant of the fact that economic development involves decision making, which is related to the political system. Whenever he discusses economic development, he almost always points to the need for involving the people in the decision making process.

The question then arises whether communication development per se contributes to more democratic control of national government to allow a broader basis of decision making. Similarly, we wonder whether economic development per se contributes to more democratic control of communication, as reflected in freedom of the press.

While some correlations have been found between indices of economic development and freedom of the press, Schramm takes the position that economic growth need not bring about greater communication freedom. Rather, he suggests that economic development, "with consequent greater political stability and a lower rate of social change, provides the conditions under which greater press freedom is feasible, and, other things being equal, that control will probably be relaxed."[5]

Regarding the relation between communication development and democratic control of national government, the answer seems to be not clear-cut either.

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[5]Op. Cit., p. 55.

As Professor Schramm has stated:

> It is clearly possible to use a more efficient school system to indoctrinate a generation with a desired political viewpoint. Efficient communication works as well for a dictator as for a democrat--probably better, in fact, for the dictator because he is more likely to seize a monopoly over communication. But on the other hand, it is clear that communication development provides the conditions for wider participation if the political philosophy permits it.[6]

While Schramm is extremely cautious about the impact of communication development on political democracy, a guarded optimism can be gleaned from his writings and the remarks he made in his classes. He saw signs of change in Soviet Russia as early as ten years ago when I was studying under him. I tend to think that recent events have not contradicted his optimism.

It has been extremely difficult to summarize within a brief paper the contributions of a scholar as prolific as Professor Schramm in a field as complex as communications and national development. If I have been less than adequate in my presentation, it is due to my own limited ability to fully grasp the scope and magnitude of Professor Schramm's work. But one thing I am quite certain of. Professor Schramm is more than a scholar. He is a humanist. Instead of merely observing how social change happens to people in the developing countries, he wants to help them play a part in bringing it about. People in these countries will tell us how far he has succeeded.

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[6] Op. Cit., pp. 55-56.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT - Writing this brief paper brings back to memory the years I studied at Stanford, particularly the courses I took from Professor Schramm. I appreciate the critical reading of the first draft of this paper by Jack Lyle, Maxwell E. McCombs, and Edwin B. Parker.